

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

If I was a betting man, I would wager that a fair number of us have heard this gospel reading many, many times.

The one that includes Jesus walking along the Sea of Galilee. He sees Simon Peter and brother Andrew, who are fishermen, and says to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"...or some very similar or catchy (no pun intended)...some catchy phrase that essentially says the same thing.

And, again....if I was a betting man, I would wager that not less than a couple of you...who have heard this passage, preached ad nauseum for almost forever...wonder how this can be approached in a new way in a Sunday sermon. How indeed.

Well, we will give that a shot in a minute or so. First, we have to set the stage with the earlier part of today's gospel reading.

Two weeks ago, at the baptism of Jesus by John, a voice is heard from heaven, saying effectively, "Here he is. The one you are looking for. And I am well pleased." Just in case there was any question about it, Jesus receives the very public "blessed assurance" in Matthew that his is **the** ministry to follow.

Last week, the lectionary took a detour through John. Raising the stakes of that ministry to an incredible magnitude. Forget just restoring Israel. Bring salvation to the ends of the earth. To everybody. And relax...I will help you do it, people of this parish. So, his is the ministry for **us** to follow.

And today is the next step. For Jesus. For Simon Peter and Andrew. And for us.

No sooner does John the Baptist get arrested, the gospel tells us that Jesus "withdrew to Galilee". Leaving his home in Nazareth, and moving to Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Napatali. The operative word there is "withdrew". Did he retreat? Was he frightened? We might think so by the use of that word. John is in jail, and the heat is on.

But remember last week's aggressive, over-the-top promise by God. Push on in faith, because I have faith in you. Do not be passive. Or fearful. Or hesitant in your mission. For I am with you.

No, Jesus moves into Galilee to up the ante. With John's arrest, he pulls the spotlight onto himself...fulfilling the prophesy in Isaiah that is repeated in today's gospel reading. And, with that, he puts into action a different application of Christmas, when light dawned in the darkness. Now, he enters his mission and his ministry, proclaims the coming of the kingdom, calls disciples, and works miracles of healing. The nativity and the ministry cannot be separated because they are both part of the Christ-event. But with the one dawning in the darkness, now...with his coming to Galilee, and the launching of his proclamation, the light begins to shine.

This is monumental stuff.

2,000 years later, we have the benefit of hindsight. Of being Monday morning quarterbacks.

But from the most simple, most plain, most common birth, we see here the beginning of a spiritual tsunami of cosmic proportions across time and space.

I am not talking about the church. It is immeasurably greater, and deeper than the impact of the church...the church being both blessed and flawed over the course of centuries, all in the name of “religion”. Some of you may be shocked by this, and I am sorry for that...but I am NOT talking about “religion”. If we look at Matthew’s gospel, Jesus seems to spend a fair amount of time blasting the “religious” of his day.

“Religion” is a term that attempts to define humanity’s created organizations or systems around a framework of some sort of spirituality. But, too often, “religion” gets perverted into a status of control and domination over those who are weak, or poor, or ill, or alone. And we are all aware of the rivers of blood and tears that have flowed over the centuries...and even today...in the name of “religion”. God knows that there are people in these very pews who have been emotionally hurt within the definition of “religion”.

No, I am talking instead about the mission and ministry of this simple carpenter. The spirit of the one through whom God lives into that aggressive promise of a plan, stated in Isaiah.

The aggressive, affirmative plan of action designed by God alone. Not by any single one of us...but by God. The plan to bring salvation to the end of the earth.

Which means what? It is the specific action of God through Jesus to initiate a global re-direction of humanity. Salvation means the re-direction of humanity, one person at a time, all for the purpose of restoring the creation of God. To bring all of creation...all of it...back into the harmony of love and peace that we can only vaguely describe as the dance among the Trinity. To bring all of creation back, through the ministry of Jesus leading the ministry of one person at a time, to the indescribable joy of being one with God.

Take out your prayer book please, and turn to page 361. After what we call the “sursum corda”, the dialogue that you and I have to come together for the great common purpose of our existence, we start:

“It is right, and a good, and joyful thing. Always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise you. Joining our voices with all of creation, forever singing this hymn to proclaim the Glory of your name: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.”

That, my dear friends, is it. All of it. The entire reason for us even being born. And, like Abraham...our children, and grandchildren, and all those born thereafter...more numerous than the stars. We get there with our hearts. These are not just words we read...but Jesus, leading by the example of his

ministry into becoming the Christ, transforms us. He changes our hearts so that we become living creatures of light. The very embodiment of the right, good and joyful thanksgiving to God.

That brings us back to the gospel message for today. Back to Jesus, walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He comes upon Simon Peter and Andrew. Brothers who are fishermen...and how he will make them fishers of men.

Back to my waging tendencies again, I would wager that you would agree with me...that many, many....MANY...a good liters, or gallons, or balloons full of hot air have been expended from pulpits world-wide in the never ending illustration of “fishers of men”. And the reason most of it is just hot air is because the lesson of Jesus in this calling of Simon Peter and Andrew is, in my mind, usually misapplied.

Usually when we hear or read this passage, we hear it preached in the context of evangelization. Jesus makes this direct statement to these fishermen, and somehow it is implied to you and me to do the same..but in the same direct way. To metaphorically, of course, throw out our fishing nets among the people...and for what reason? Why? To make believers out of them? To fill up our pews? And our collection plates? To get their help in sustaining our building? Our heating bill?

Of course not. It would be an overstatement to conclude that, according to Matthew, Jesus could not care less about the religious institutions of his day...but close. It is NOT an overstatement, however, to conclude that Jesus focused wholly, and solely, on his ministry and mission...the re-direction of all humanity back into unity with God and God’s creation.

So, instead of interpreting the commission to Simon Peter and Andrew as a vocational adjustment for gathering purposes, we need to see and hear this a different way. One that calls to each of us...even to those of us who hate to put a fishing worm on a hook:

Jesus tells Simon Peter and Andrew to come with him, to learn from him. Why? They presumably had few “people skills”. We did not know them to be charismatic, and can presume that their only excellent skill was fishing.

Of course, that is the whole point of their choosing. They were good, hard-working, ordinary people. Not the professionals. Not the educated. But the perfect people to go out into the world...the world of the 21st century...to do what? To evangelize? To load up the pews? No.

They were the perfect people to go out into the world...one by one...to spread the news and word that “it is right, and a good, and joyful thing. Always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” That is what we are called to do. That is what we **already** do. Our problem is the same one that faced Simon Peter and Andrew: lack of confidence. We just do not talk about how God is good to us, because we often do not recognize how that is, and often do not have the courage to do so.

That is why Jesus told those two about being made “fishers of men”. It was the enticement, the encouragement they needed....Jesus, in that simple phrase, made them curious as to what he was talking about, but also phrased it in a way that made them comfortable. Fishing they knew...but for men?

That is a revelation for this morning's message. Look for God, through Jesus, to look for ways to engage you in ways that use the gifts and talents that God has already blessed you with...as we journey together in the ministry for the love of God we know to be the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.